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BLACK WIDOW

DEADLY ORIGIN

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PREVIOUSLY IN

BLACK WIDOW

DEADLY ORIGIN

All little Natalia Romanova grew up knowing was combat and espionage, training that made her a highly skilled and dangerous Russian spy. But, in the ruins of postwar Berlin, even she couldn't prevent her friend and mentor, Ivan, from being horribly wounded. He was saved by the Soviets, who gave both Ivan and Natalia a serum that extended their lifespans indefinitely.

Now Ivan has finally met his demise, the victim of a brutal and bizarre murder. Before his mysterious end, he warned Natalia about "The Icepick Protocol," which would kill everyone she had ever cared for. When Natalia investigated, she found her old friend's body – but, disturbingly, not his head.

She uncovered how "The Icepick Protocol" was designed to manipulate people into homicidal rages – by the use of nanites with which she was infected, thereby infecting her friends, allies, and lovers. At once, Natalia began tracking down everyone she had been close to throughout her career. It was her rescue of Hercules that led her to the realization of who was behind such madness – Ivan himself – and where to find him: on the fabled space battleship of a long gone Russia, the Dreadnought!

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NEAR-EARTH ORBIT...

IVAN.

SO MY OLD FRIEND WASN'T *MURDERED.*

"HE DID IT TO *HIMSELF.*

"IF ANYONE HEARS THIS MESSAGE, GET THE INTEL TO NICK FURY. IVAN HAD HIS OWN BODY DESTROYED...

"...EXCEPT FOR THE *BRAIN* AND *SPINAL COLUMN.* WHICH HE'S APPARENTLY HAD TRANSPLANTED INTO SOME SORT OF METAL--

"--*MONSTER.*"

BLACK WIDOW: DEADLY ORIGIN CHAPTER FOUR

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<"NOBODY EVER DIES!">

A FEW YEARS AGO, PARIS.

<EVEN IF YOU *THINK* THE AVENGERS ARE DEAD, THAT YOU'RE THE *LAST*...>

<THEY'LL BE *BACK*, 'TASHA.>*

L'ILFA

*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN.

<IT'S WHAT WESTERN SUPER HEROES DO. RESURRECT THEMSELVES.>

<AND IF THEY *ARE* GONE...>

<YOU COULD JOIN ME. I'VE BEEN GETTING MY OWN PLANS TOGETHER. *BIG* PLANS.>

<WE STILL WORK WELL TOGETHER. I'M STILL YOUR GUY IN EUROPE, AREN'T I?>

<YOU'VE HAD YOUR CHANCE TO BE NATALIA FOR THE WORLD.>

<MAYBE IT'S TIME TO GO BACK TO BEING *MY* LITTLE NATASHA.>

<THIS IS YOUR *LAST CHANCE*.>

<NATASHA?>

<NO!>

<IVAN--!>

<YOU *MUST* KNOW, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...>

<I DON'T THINK OF YOU LIKE *THAT*. I *CAN'T*. I THINK OF YOU AS A-->

<YOU THINK OF ME LIKE YOU THINK OF *MOTHER RUSSIA*.>

<A NICE *WARM* FEELING. AS LONG AS YOU CAN PLAY THE FIELD.>

<YOU HAVE *NO IDEA* HOW YOU'VE HURT ME ALL THESE YEARS. WATCHING YOU PICK FAVORITES AS THE OLD CERTAINTIES FELL APART.>

<IT WAS LIKE...>

<AN *ICEPICK*.>

<THROUGH MY HEART.>

<GOD HELP ME.>

THAT *KISS.*

THEN THAT CODEWORD TO ACTIVATE THE NANITES HE'D JUST *INFECTED* ME WITH...

I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED--

<SHOULD YOU, 'TASHA?>

<YOU NEVER THOUGHT THIS OLD DOG COULD BITE YOU.>

<NOT STRAIGHT-FORWARD, HONEST OLD IVAN!>

<YOU'RE THE ONE WITH ALL THE EXPERIENCE AT...>

BETRAYAL!

THAT'S WHAT THIS IS!

TWO YEARS AGO, DURING THE SUPER HERO CIVIL WAR, NEW YORK CITY. STEVE ROGERS: CAPTAIN AMERICA.

STEVE, PLEASE...!

THAT'S WHY I WANTED THIS MEETING. TO *EXPLAIN* TO YOU...

WHY I *CAN'T* TAKE YOUR SIDE.

IT DOESN'T MEAN I'VE CHOSEN TONY STARK OVER YOU.

MEN ALWAYS THINK--

I DON'T.

I JUST THINK HE'S *RIGHT*. PEOPLE WITH POWERS HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, TO WORK TOGETHER.

I'VE SEEN THE AVENGERS RIPPED APART SO MANY TIMES!

SO...

NOW YOU'RE FOR AN IDEOLOGY?

FOR TONY'S *CONTROLLING* CONCEPT OF THE STATE?

BECAUSE *YOU* WANT TO STOP GETTING HURT.

THAT'S ALL YOU STAND FOR? A CYCLE OF *ABUSE*?

THAT SOUNDS LIKE YOU *GIVING UP*.

IF YOU REALLY BELIEVED THIS, YOU WOULDN'T TALK ABOUT HOW HISTORY HAS SHAPED YOU.

YOU'D JUST SAY YOU'D DECIDED.

YOU'RE **FREE**, NATALIA. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAD TO FIGHT HARDEST FOR THAT.

YOU'VE NEVER NEEDED A MAN TO TELL YOU.

DAMN YOU. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW *TIRED* I AM.

LISTEN, EVEN IF IT TURNS OUT I'M ON THE WRONG SIDE, IT MAKES SENSE FOR ME TO STAY CLOSE TO TONY--

SO THEN...

...YOU CAN JUST BETRAY *HIM* TOO?

I'M SORRY. THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO SAY IT.

"<A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PAIN YOU'VE CAUSED...>"

<...A VISIT TO EVERY FAILED RELATIONSHIP. ALL THOSE MEN WHO WEREN'T ME...>

<...BEFORE I FINALLY LET YOU DIE.>

<THAT WAS MY PLAN FOR YOU, 'TASHA. THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU ABOUT ICEPICK.>

<BUT YOU HAD TO GO AND RUIN THAT TOO.>

<IVAN, THIS IS THE SERUM TALKING. THE CHEMICAL THAT'S KEPT YOU ALIVE FOR YEARS. IT'S MADE YOU -->

<NO, I THINK IT WAS YOU WHO MADE ME MAD, 'TASHA.>

<AT LEAST LIKE THIS I'M MAD AND INVULNERABLE.>

<IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE YOU'VE BECOME A WESTERN SUPER VILLAIN.>

<YOU KNOW, LIKE YOU ALWAYS HATED?>

YOU'RE KEEPING ME TALKING. SO I'LL EXPLAIN MY SECRET PLANS.>

<BUT THAT'S NOT HOW THIS WILL BE.>

<I CAN ORDER WHAT'S INSIDE YOU TO KILL YOU. JUST BY THINKING IT.>

<SO, BEST KEEP ME HAPPY, EH, 'TASHA? HA HA HA!>

<COME ON...>

<LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I MADE!>

<THE DREADNOUGHT WAS DESIGNED TO DEFEAT THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER. IT WAS TOO EXPENSIVE TO BUILD.>

<UNTIL NOW.>

<NOW THERE ARE MANY RICH AND RESENTFUL PEOPLE IN RUSSIA.>

<ALL WITH VARYING IDEOLOGIES.>

<LIKE YOU TAUGHT ME, I'M DALLYING WITH THEM ALL...>

<THAT'S JUST ABOUT EVERY MISSING NUCLEAR WARHEAD IN THE WORLD, BY THE WAY.>

<FOR THE MOST GENEROUS BILLIONAIRE, I CAN WAGE TERRIBLE WAR TO ORDER, FROM MY OWN LITTLE NATION HERE.>

<I CHOSE THE IMPERIAL EAGLE DESIGN BECAUSE IT REMINDED ME OF YOU, ROMANOVA...>

<THERE WERE TIMES WHEN I THOUGHT, "HEY, I'LL ASK HER TO JOIN ME.">

<AND LOOKING AT YOU NOW, I'M TEMPTED AGAIN. THIS BODY IS FULLY FUNCTIONAL, YOU KNOW. HA HA HA!>

<BUT REMEMBER THAT ORBITAL BOMBER THAT WAS STOLEN? THAT WAS MY PEOPLE.>

<THE TECH WOULD HAVE HELPED SYNTHESIZE ALL WE HAVE HERE: THE ALIEN, THE ALT REALITY, THE ASGARDIAN.>

<WHEN YOU PREVENTED THE THEFT, I THOUGHT: ON THE ONE HAND, SHE IS LIKE ME. SHE JUST GOES WITH THE SIDE SHE MOST LIKES.>

<BUT ON THE OTHER: SHE'D NEVER PICK MY SIDE.>

<YOU DO REALIZE THAT'S YOUR ONLY CONTINUING BELIEF-- THAT YOU AND I SHOULDN'T BE TOGETHER?>

<BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED. I'VE GOT YOU. NOW...>

<COME AND SIT ON UNCLE IVAN'S LAP.>

FOUR YEARS AGO, NEW YORK.

YELENA, I ACCEPT YOU'RE THE LATEST BRILLIANT GRADUATE OF THE RED ROOM...

BUT YOU HAVE TO SEE YOU'RE BEING *MANIPULATED*. YOU HAVE TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

YELENA BELOVA: THE NEW BLACK WIDOW.

THREE YEARS AGO, NEW YORK. A SHORT-LIVED ALLIANCE OF HEROES.

I AGREE. HUNTING DOWN THE PUNISHER IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

LAST YEAR, NEW YORK. JAMES BARNES: THE WINTER SOLDIER.

JAMES, I'VE DECIDED: WORKING WITH YOU, TO HONOR CAPTAIN AMERICA'S MEMORY...

IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

<HOW FRAGILE DO YOU THINK I AM?>

<WHAT YOU DID TO ME WITH THE NANITES...>

<IT DIDN'T REVEAL SOME TAWDRY TRUTH ABOUT WHO I AM.>

<IT SAYS MORE ABOUT YOU.>

<ABOUT THE SHAPE YOU WANTED TO TWIST ME INTO. SO YOU COULD FEEL BETTER ABOUT ME REJECTING YOU.>

<YOU SAY I PICK SIDES.>

<I PICK GOOD GUYS. I PICK WINNERS.>

<I PICK REGRET AND KINDNESS AND MERCY.>

EARLIER THIS YEAR, MOSCOW.
ALEXEI SHOSTAKOV.
FORMER TEST PILOT.
FORMER SOVIET SUPER HERO.
FORMER HUSBAND.

<IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU.>

<I'M AMAZED YOU WANTED TO MEET, SINCE YOU LEARNED I WAS ALIVE...>

<ALL THAT'S HAPPENED, THESE EXTRAORDINARY LIVES OF OURS...>

<I'M SO *SORRY*, NATALIA.>

<FOR *EVERYTHING*.>

<THAT'S ALL I NEEDED TO HEAR.>

<THOSE OF US WHO TOOK THE SERUM...>

<NATALIA, IT PLEASES ME TO THINK THAT IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, YOU'LL STILL BE ALIVE.>

<AND YOU'LL STILL BE *EXTRAORDINARY*.>

<HUSH, RED GUARDIAN...>

<HUSH.>

<OUR SHEER *AGE* MAKES US SEE THE WORLD *DIFFERENTLY*.>

<THE BEST WE CAN HOPE FOR IS TO TREAT EACH OTHER GENTLY.>

<ALEXEI WAS THE *FIRST* I SAVED FROM YOU SHOWING *NO MERCY.*>

<NOW I'M GOING TO WALK OUT THAT DOOR.>

<I'M BETTING ... YOU WON'T FLICK YOUR LITTLE SWITCH AND KILL ME.>

<NOT UNTIL I'M *HUMBLED.* NOT WITH ME STILL *DEFYING* YOU.>

<NATASHA!>

<DON'T *TEMPT* ME, 'TASHA!>

<I HOLD THE POWER OF LIFE AND *DEATH* OVER YOU! I COULD DO IT SO *EASILY!*>

<NATASHA! PLEASE!>

<DAMN IT!>

<SWITCHING OFF THE LIGHTS DOESN'T REALLY MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE TO ME NOW, 'TASHA!>

<IT DOES TO ME.>

<YOU CAN TELL THE *TRUTH* IN THE DARK. IF YOU WANT US TO TALK LIKE OLD FRIENDS, THEN *LET'S.*>

<IVAN, I REALIZED, YEARS AGO...>

<...I FINALLY BECAME *ONE WHOLE PERSON*...>

<...ONLY WHEN YOU *LEFT.*>

<I'LL MAKE YOU HUMBLE!>

<I'LL MAKE YOU BEG!>

BDDDDAAA

<MAYBE IF YOU CAN CALM DOWN ENOUGH TO THINK STRAIGHT.>

<OOPS. THERE GOES...>

<...GRAVITY.>

<IVAN, YOU HAVE *CHILDREN.*>

<SWITCH OFF THE NANITES. WE'LL GET YOU PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT. YOU HAVE MY WORD...>

<AS A *PROFESSIONAL.*>

ARARRRGGG!

BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA

<I'M NOT A MAN ANYMORE. YOU CAN'T JUST BRUSH ME OFF!>

<I'M A NATION!>

<A MEANINGFUL, HISTORICAL, SERIOUS...>

<YES, YES. YOU'RE SO BIG.>

<AND I'D LIKE TO BELONG...>

<I REALLY WOULD. I'D LIKE TO BELONG TO SOMETHING.>

<BUT I CAN'T. BECAUSE JUST LIKE EVERY OTHER NATION DID...>

<YOU KILLED MY IVAN.>

<'TASHA... WHAT...?>

<I TOOK A SAMPLE OF YOUR NEW BODY'S NANITES FROM YOUR BRANDY GLASS...>

<IT TOOK THE ONES I'M CARRYING A FEW MINUTES TO HACK IN.>

<I'VE JUST SHUT OFF YOUR ABILITY TO KILL ME. OR TO FIRE YOUR WEAPONS.>

<AND...NOW I HAVE CONTROL OF THE DREADNOUGHT. AND YOUR PERSONAL DEFENSE SHIELDS.>

<SO...>

<THIS IS *YOUR* LAST CHANCE.>

<TO SAY SORRY.>

<OR AT LEAST TO CALL ME BY MY *REAL* NAME.>

GLARRGHH!

BLAM

NUCLEAR WARHEADS...

TWENTY MINUTES TO MASS DETONATION...

AND WHAT THE HELL, AN EVACUATION ALARM...

"I FEEL MERCIFUL TODAY."

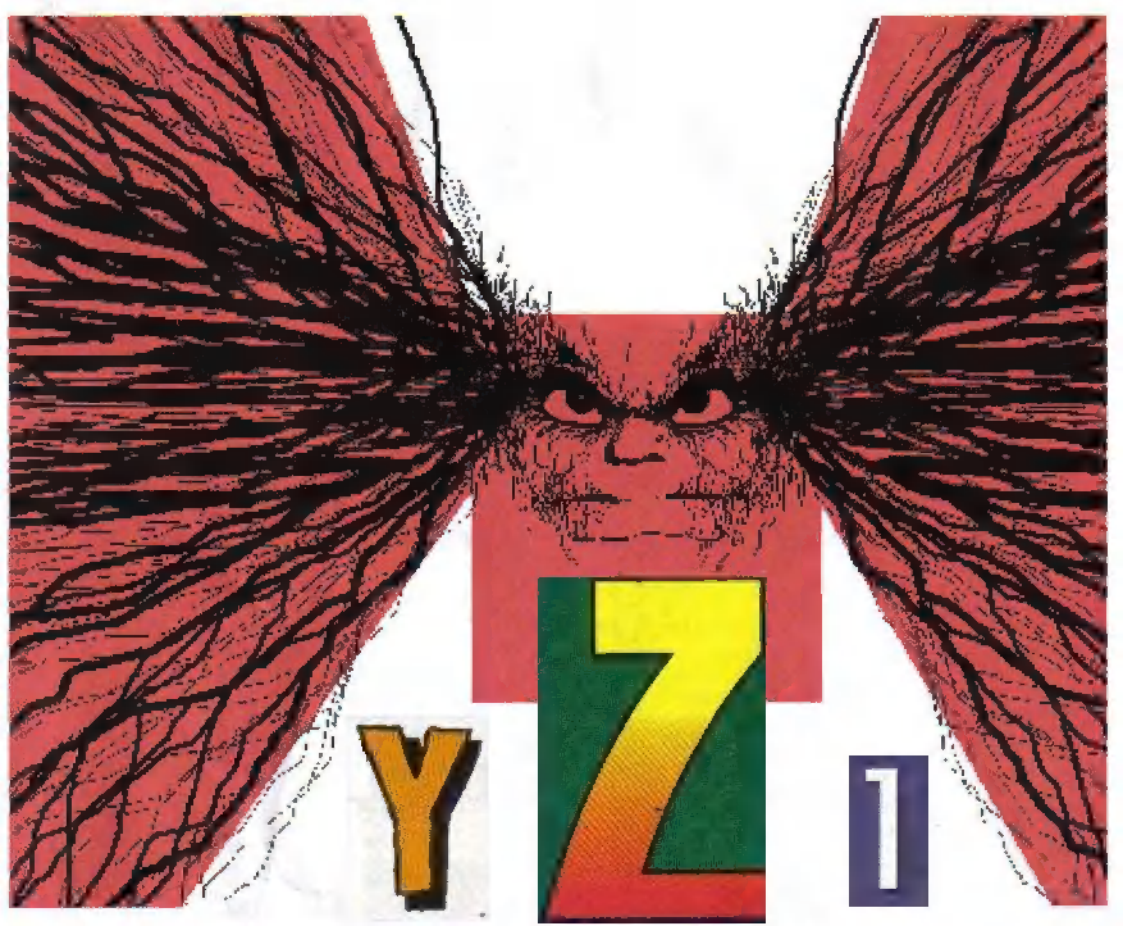
VODKA. OF *COURSE* THERE IS.

TO IVAN PETROVICH BEZUKHOV...

AS PROMISED-- A *TOAST.*

AND THAT'S ALL.

THE END.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